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ABSTRACT

Principles are presented for teaching history in the two-year college. The first section offers guidelines for the selection of the subject matter to be taught, indicating that faculty meetings can be a helpful method of identifying vital facts, concepts, and relevant content for student mastery in the classroom. The next section considers psychological aspects of teaching and learning, setting forth six principles: (1) students need to perceive the purpose or value of learning; (2) material should be presented in a stimulating manner; (3) instructors must assist students to attach meaning to the facts, concepts, and generalizations they are learning; (4) students should be guided to utilize higher order thinking skills; (5) students must learn to use primary and secondary data sources; and (6) students need to attain understanding, skills, and attitudinal objectives. Finally, the paper urges junior college history instructors to examine and to experiment with diverse instructional philosophies, including those that emphasize problem solving, the subject-centered approach, the use of measurably stated objectives, and the student-centered approach. (AJL)

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TEACHING HISTORY IN THE JUNIOR COLLEGE

by

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TEACHING HISTORY IN THE JUNIOR COLLEGE

The history teacher needs to have adequate course work on the undergraduate and graduate degree levels pertaining to his/her academic area of expertise. An interest in history as a profession is a must. To be a true professional in the teaching of history requires life-long study and learning. Continual study of history be it on university campuses or as research on the personal level needs to be emphasized as ongoing by the junior college instructor.

Selection of Subject Matter to be Taught

The junior college history instructor needs to select relevant content for student mastery in the classroom. Vital facts, concepts, and generalizations need to be selected by the history teacher for students to acquire. There are no absolute standards to utilize in making these selections. A well educated historian with adequate deliberation needs to select subject matter in history which has endured in time and space. Universal content is then in the offing for student acquisistion.

History teachers on the junior college level need to discuss, analyze, and appraise which facts, concepts, and generalizations would be worthy to emphasize as objectives in the classroom. A series of meetings by history teachers would assist in clarifying vital content for junior college students to achieve. Trivial subject matter in history needs to be weeded out. With the explosion of knowledge in history, it behooves the junior college instructor to seek content which is vital and not inert. Content such as this should guide students to be able to reconstruct the past, as well as understand the present more effectively.

The Psychology of Learning and the Teaching of History

The history teacher in the junior college needs to follow desired criteria when teaching students. First of all, history students need to perceive purpose or values for learning. Thus, the history teacher should explain to students why selected content is salient for student acquisition. This assists learners to perceive values in studying selected subject matter. Purpose and value in acquiring historical facts, concepts, and generalizations may also be perceived inductively. With quality questions, history students might be guided to perceive value in studying selected content. If students in junior college history courses accept reasons for learning, increased achievement should be an end result.

Secondly, history teachers need to present content in a stimulating manner. Junior college students, as a result, develop feelings of motivation. Motivation makes for increased energy levels for achievement in history. Appropriate voice inflection, enthusiasm for teaching of history, and quality eye-contact with students in the class setting are musts for the junior college teacher. A variety of activities in the teaching of history should also be stimulating for students to attain more optimally in history. Thus carefully selected textbooks (multiple or single series), video-tapes, video-discs, slides, films, filmstrips, transparencies, and discussion, as learning opportunities should meet needs of individual students in history. Each student should be guided to achieve as much as possible.

Thirdly, the junior college history teacher must assist students to attach meaning to historical content presented. With meaningful learnings, students understand facts, concepts, and generalizations.

Comprehending content presented by the history teacher is vital. Students also need to apply what has been learned to a new situation. Relevant concepts and generalizations achieved might be reused again and again in a spiral history curriculum.

Fourthly, students should be guided to utilize higher levels of cognition. Thus, within a discussion framework, junior college students must learn to analyze. To analyze, a learner must be able to separate the trivial from the relevant, the inaccurate from the accurate, and opinions from facts. After analyzing content, junior college students need to synthesize subject matter. Each generalization needs to be supported by vital facts. Generalizations should be evaluated in terms of their comprehensiveness. Each generalization has adequate supporting facts and is free from weak summaries and conclusions.

Fifthly, students in junior college history classes must receive guidance to utilize primary and secondary data sources. Primary sources represent eye-witness accounts of events by those directly on the scene of the happening or occurence. The original item such as genuine antiques, coins, stamps, letters, diary entries, journals, newspaper accounts, autobiographies, court house records, and geneologies, among others, represent primary sources for student investigation in ongoing lessons and units in junior college history.

Secondary sources pertain to those that are a step removed from an eye-witness account. Thus, paraphrased content, reproductions, and models of the original might well be excellent for students to study in history. However, these are not primary sources of historical content. Most data sources such as textbook and workbook content, as well as audio-visual materials contain content classified as secondary sources.

The junior college history teacher needs to assist students to utilize both primary and secondary data sources.

Sixthly, students need to attain understandings, skills, and attitudinal objectives. Balance among these three categories of objectives must be an end result in the teaching of history. Understandings objectives stress students acquiring vital facts, concepts, and generalizations. Relevant subject matter is then taught by the junior college history teacher. As a second category of objectives, learners need to achieve skills such as critical and creative thinking, as well as problem solving. Attitudinal goals, a third category of objectives, stress students developing positive attitudes, feelings, and values toward history as an academic discipline. Each of these three categories of objectives affect a different category such as quality attitudes assist students to acquire more subject matter in history.

The Philosophy of Teaching History

Junior college history instructors need to examine and experiment with diverse philosophies of teaching history. As a first philosophy to be discussed, problem solving may be emphasized. Within a lesson or unit in history, students are stimulated to identify problems. Each problem must be clearly stated so that solutions may be sought. Data or information is then gathered, directly related to the problem. The data sources would be primary and secondary. After adequate data or information has been acquired, students with teacher guidance develop an hypothesis or answer to the problem. The hypothesis is tentative, not an absolute. Thus, each hypothesis needs testing utilizing additional

data sources. With testing, the hypothesis is modified, refuted, or accepted.

Problems in history selected by students with instructor encouragement assists the former to integrate facts, concepts, and generalizations to arrive at solutions. Subject matter is not learned for its own sake, but is instrumental to the solving of vital problems. In addition to history, other social science disciplines may also be needed in problem solving. Students then perceive knowledge as being related, rather than as isolated component parts.

As a second philsophy of teaching, the junior college history instructor may stress a subject centered approach. The goal of history teaching here is to emphasize historical content to be valuable for its own sake. History, as an academic area in general education, assists students to develop well intellectually. Stimulating content in history is presented in a challenging and motivating manner. Historical content guides students in mental development. Mind is real and needs development through a study of vital subject matter in history.

The instructor needs to utilize criteria of relevance, vitality, structure, and essential to select content in history representing the basics. A common core of content in history is necessary for all students to acquire. The core of knowledge represents the hallmarks of a well educated person.

Content in history is not vocational but rather academic, possessing intrinsic values. A broadly educated student in the general education sequence needs to have a history instructor that is highly academic, subject centered, and dedicated to his/her area of expertise.

The junior college history instructor guides students from being finite to the infinite. A more adequate knowledge base for the junior college student in history should develop the individual to become increasingly adequate in the general education arena.

A third philosophy in teaching history advocates the utilization of measurably stated objectives for students to achieve. Each objective is precisely stated. Thus after instruction, the history instructor measures if a student has or has not attained an objective. Observable results, not internal learnings, are wanted from learners to determine goal attainment.

The instructor announces clearly and concisely what is to be learned from each lesson presentation prior to instruction. Students then know exactly what is expected of them as a result of instruction. In the announcement prior to instruction, students understand what is salient to learn. These learnings provide content for tests to be administered by the history teacher at designated intervals. Test items are objective, rather than subjective in nature. Thus, the instructor measures what students have learned. Items missed on the test by students provide data to the instructor as to facts, concepts, and generalizations which need reteaching.

Test items align with the measurably stated objectives. The tests then tend to be valid and reliable if each item possesses clarity and meaning. Precision in measurement is salient. The junior college history teacher desires to know exactly how much content each student has mastered.

A fourth philosophy emphasizes rather heavy input from students in determining what is to be learned in history. Here, the instructor

encourages students to raise questions within ongoing lessons and units. These questions may well provide scope and sequence in history. The history instructor might also ask students what they would want to discuss from the assigned reading for today. Students may become quite proficient in choosing questions for discussion, as well as to be active participants in this endeavor. Student-teacher planning is encouraged. The intrinsic interests, purposes, and goals of students are heavy determinants here in the history curriculum.

In Closing

Definite criteria exist which need to be followed in teaching of history. Thus the junior college instructor needs to

1. emphasize relevant, vital subject matter in ongoing lessons and units.
2. encourage students to utilize primary as well as secondary data sources.
3. stress student purpose, interest, and meaning in ongoing lessons and units.
4. advocate balance in objectives to be achieved by students.

Three kinds of objectives then need to be attained by students which are understandings, skills, and attitudes.

Possible philosophies to emphasize in teaching history include

1. problem solving.
2. subject centered approaches.
3. utilization of measurably stated objectives.
4. student-teacher planning.

Each student needs to attain optimally in history. Teaching strategies need development and implementation which guide learners in desiring to learn as much as individual capabilities permit.

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